

Daughters of the Digital Empire

Book One of
Moonlight Hearts

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And Margaret Lovelace

Chapter 12: Object Reader

Back at Castle Octavian, I led Fiona to my bedroom. At the door to my room Fiona stopped me.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Taking me back to your bedroom is not appropriate at this juncture." Fiona said.

Of course not, I realized. The Castle had a drawing room and a parlor for entertaining guests. Fiona had stopped me from making a major mistake. Bedrooms weren't social spaces in Victorian times. I had been far too familiar with a woman who had only asked to court me today.

"You're right. I wasn't thinking. I am so sorry." I held my hands up as if in prayer and bowed my head.

"You need not apologize. But I thank you."

"I'll take you to the parlor," I said.

"That would be fine." Fiona answered.

We headed for the parlor, only for Lynn to intercept us. She wore a simple pastel purple empire cut dress. I noticed a woven silver and gold graduated necklace with amethysts.

"Did you deliver my message and your apology?" Lynn asked.

"I did."

"Do you think it helped?" She asked, her hands clasped in front of her.

I thought back to the disinterested response the ambassador had given, and said, "He didn't seem to care."

"He displayed a disinterested attitude. But his subordinate tried to kill you. So I suspect what we said had an impact."

Lynn stopped moving, "What?"

Fiona nodded, "A werewolf attacked Ren. I dispatched it. The beast turned out to be Wulfric's bodyguard."

"You were attacked by a werewolf? Did it cut you? Are you infected?"

"We remain unharmed," Fiona answered.

"Fiona took him out in one blow." I gushed.

"What did the city watch say?" Lynn asked.

"Nothing. He attacked us in an abandoned street. There were no city guards and no townfolk. Nobody saw us. Ren was in shock from the encounter. And so I left the body for others to discover. I am countess. Nobody will question my decision."

"But why would they try to kill you?" Lynn whispered.

"That is the question," I said, "We're off script though. I don't know what comes next."

"Neither do I," Lynn answered, "You had to slap Wulfric. Why did you have to have my back like that? I'm not worth this. And now people will die."

"Lady Lynn," Fiona said, "People are always dying. You are not responsible for all of them. Leave responsibility of the barony to your father. Leave responsibility of the duchy to Leon. You have sent your message accepting his less than charming proposal. Ren has apologized. This does not undo what has happened. But you have done what you can."

"I can always do more." Lynn answered.

"You have a responsibility to your friends and family," Fiona continued, "You owe it to them not to burn yourself up."

"But I don't deserve them." Lynn said.

"This is pouring out now, isn't it?" I said, "You popped the seal on talking about your self-esteem issues and your martyr complex. And now you can't stop."

"Ren, please. Don't psychoanalyze me now. I can't handle it."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm not trying to hurt you. If I am, then I'm stopping."

"You're hurting me. I know you're trying to help. But you're hurting. First you slapped Prince Wulfric. I knew how to handle him. And now I don't. And now, you've botched the apology. I don't know how, but why else would they send an assassin?"

"I don't know. What if Wulfric decided to kill me for the slap? That's not too far-fetched is it?"

"That isn't better! And that's still because of what you did!" She said, "Don't help Ren. End of story. Don't help. I love you. But please. Don't help. I can't survive your help."

She turned and ran. Lynn and I always clashed over her self-esteem issues. And I had a skill for making things worse. I moved to follow her, but Fiona put a hand on my shoulder.

"You will be no help." She said, "Lynn cannot see. Her fear of failure has blinded her. You will make things worse. Let us go to the parlor and deal with our own problems."

Nobody else was in the parlor. That served me well enough. The room had several wingback chairs and three loveseats. The wallpaper depicted a plant themed arabesque pattern in cyan and tea green. In the parlor we sat on loveseats opposite each other with a coffee table between the loveseats.

"I don't know any of the servants who have mystic gifts," I said, "So we'll have to ask the servants one by one."

"Or we could seek out a professional psychometrist. We could talk to somebody who uses object reading to make a living."

I nodded, "Good idea. Let's see if we get lucky with the servants, and then move on to the professionals so we don't waste time. How does that sound?"

“Ladies, would either of you like a drink?”

I looked up to see Amy standing above us with a drinks tray.

“Brilliant timing. Thank you Amy. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You’ll never have to find out, my lady.” Amy said with a smile and a slight blush.

I took a glass of red wine and took a sip.

Fiona looked at Amy, and then back to me. I raised my eyebrows, “What is it?”

“How long have you two been together?” Fiona asked

I gasped, and looked in shock at Fiona. And then I downed the rest of the wine. I grabbed a second glass and tipped my head back to down that glass as well.

Amy took a step back, “Your Excellency, I am not sure what you mean.”

Fiona looked between us again, and then nodded.

“You may, of course, count upon my discretion. We are alone. I will not speak this way in company.”

“It isn’t that, Fiona!” I said.

Fiona looked back at me, “Then is it because we are courting? I have nothing against you keeping a ladybird. Should we marry, I do plan to seek out male companionship for pleasure and producing an heir. ”

“Of course,” I said, lips pursed, “I have no problem with you doing that. But what makes you think that we’re a couple?”

“My gift to see auras confirmed it,” Fiona said, “But I could tell before that.”

“You’re courting?” Amy asked, a small frown forming. “When did that happen?”

Fiona looked at her, "To be precise, it has not happened. I have asked to court your mistress. I will send over the formal Scythian gift which marks the beginning of our courtship in short order. Then we will be courting."

"Perhaps we can start by asking Amy our question," I said, trying to change the subject.

"Yes, that is a good idea. We can discuss our respective relationship statuses later." Fiona answered.

Amy looked at Fiona and then at myself, "What question did you want to ask?"

"Did you know any of the servants who have a mystic gift? We're looking for somebody with the Object Read gift."

Amy blinked, "Really? Really?" she paused and then caught herself. "I'm sorry, Lady Ren, that was rude of me."

I smiled, "It's fine, and we may as well act as though we're alone at this point. She has figured us out."

Amy flinched, "Don't confirm it!"

Fiona looked at Amy, "You seemed surprised when we mentioned Object Read. Why is that?"

"Well, I do know somebody with the Object Read gift. I see them in the mirror each morning."

I shook my head, "You can Object Read?"

Amy nodded.

"You are full of surprises," Fiona said.

"But not enough of them stay surprises," Amy sighed.

